

IT IS STILL A BAD BILL

It was classic New Labour spin. When the government published its response to the Puttnam report on the draft Communications Bill, Culture Secretary, Tessa Jowell proudly said that, of the 148 recommendations, they agreed with 120 of them. She claimed, 'A good bill has been made better.'

We disagree. It is still a bad bill. There has been no movement on the key proposals which organisations like the CPBF have kicked up a stink about.

Britain is on course to become a satellite of the US if the Communications Bill, just published by the government, gets an easy passage through parliament.

By ignoring widespread public concern and relaxing media ownership rules the bill opens up UK TV and radio channels to the highest bidder, in particular to powerful US-based global media groups like Sumner Redstone's Viacom and AOL Time Warner. Rupert Murdoch will also get a piece of the action—the bill will enable him to take over Channel 5. It would also make it easier for other powerful US-based media groups to buy into UK newspapers, radio and TV.

CPBF chair Julian Petley points out, 'The Communications Bill is a product of the government's eagerness to sell off public services. We've recently seen the disastrous results of market-driven policies on our railways. Now we'll have US media moguls deciding what we can read, watch and what information we receive.' He predicts a dumbing down of broadcasting as commercial companies go for mass-

produced programmes attracting big audiences and the most profits.

The bill lets these companies completely off the hook, failing to stipulate the amount of special interest programmes, quality news, current affairs, education and entertainment material they must carry. At this rate the BBC will be left in a public service ghetto catering only for minority audiences.

The government has ignored the concerns raised recently in the Puttnam report, as well as by a host of media campaigners, trade unions and community organisations—that programme quality, diversity and plurality should be protected. The bill is also a slap in the face for UK nations and regions whose media can now be swallowed up by foreign owners with no regard to social and cultural factors and no commitment to local production.

The Scottish and Welsh assemblies have no voice, either, in the new super-regulator OFCOM. The bill provides for just 9 people on the



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JULIAN PETLEY

OFCOM board, only slightly larger than that proposed in the original draft bill. The content board and consumer panel intended to work alongside OFCOM have no teeth and can only advise the regulator.

We expect a groundswell of public anger against the Communications Bill when people realise what is at stake. 'We will fight this bill to the last letter to stop Britain being landed with an ultra-commercial, US-style media system,' Julian Petley said.

THE MAIN CHANGES

Carriage charges favour Sky

A KEY change in the Bill is the removal of the 'must carry' requirement of public service channels (BBC/ITV/4&5 (from the satellite platform Sky). Cable and terrestrial platforms have this requirement, but ITV pay £17m and the BBC £4m for their programmes to be on Sky. This is another change in the bill which favour Rupert Murdoch's media group, News International.

Media ownership

INTENSE lobbying by the Commercial Radio Companies Association has changed the '3plus1' rule to '2 plus 1'. It means that radio companies will be able to consolidate so that there are only two difference owners of radio stations, plus the BBC in area one radio region.

Regulation

THE term 'light touch' has been changed to 'fleet-of-foot' regulation. It still means the same thing though!

THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL FORUM IN FLORENCE

GRANVILLE WILLIAMS

on a truly international event
THE beautiful Italian city of Florence was the setting for an inspiring and tremendously successful gathering, with the theme 'Another World is Possible'. Forty thousand people, mainly young, gathered from across Europe and 80 other countries to engage in a series of passionate debates, seminars, workshops and artistic events on the big issues: War and Peace; Globalisation and Liberalism; Rights, Citizenship, Democracy.

The event's location in Florence generated great hostility from sections of the media, conservative intellectuals and politicians. Oriana Fallaci, for example, wrote a vitriolic full-page piece in *Corriere della Sera*. She said the Forum participants menaced her home town in the same way the occupying Nazis had done. She invited Florentines to close down their city and hang out signs saying 'Closed for Mourning'. Easy advice from someone who lives in New York now.

The Italian Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi, also tried to prevent participants travelling to Florence from other countries by imposing border controls.

They seemed to want to generate a sense of impending violence and destruction, with the fear that the art treasures of Renaissance Florence would be threatened by mob violence and vandalism. The target of other anti-globalisation protests, McDonalds, pulled down the shutters during the forum, along with most of the jewellers' shops on the Ponte Vecchio, and other luxury shops. Also there was the presence of 8,000 police. I counted four other civilians in my hotel on the first night I was there, the rest were uniformed police.

The contrast between the predicted media fears of violence, and the actual peaceful, relaxed, convivial atmosphere of the forum was so dramatic. The events took place in Florence's



16th century da Basso Fortress, which has within it conference and exhibition halls. In one hall were the stands of an amazing variety of Europe's political, environmental, publishing and campaigning organisations.

I was there to represent the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and speak in a session titled Globalisation, Information and the Right to Communication on Thursday afternoon, November 7. Earlier in the day there had been a session, which must have been attended by over 1,000 people, on Information and Culture, with speakers from Italy, Greece, Germany and the Netherlands. Cees Hamelink, who has written some excellent works on media imperialism, gave a powerful and passionate presentation.

For me, what is encouraging about this new, still diffuse and developing social and political movement, is the importance placed on thinking about the media, and challenging the power of global media to exclude or marginalise reporting about the very issues the forum was debating, and developing ideas for alternative media.

The session I was involved with took place in the theatre, and was packed out. It lasted over three hours and the audience stayed to listen to journalists from RAI, *Corriere della Sera* and Media Watch. Inevitably much of the discussion took place against the backdrop of the disturbing phenomenon of Silvio Berlusconi, who has used media power to boost his political agenda and influence in Italy. I made lots of

contacts from the session, which will help us build links to organisations with similar interests to the CPBF.

It was fitting that the finale of the forum was a march through Florence, which involved the 40,000 forum participants joining over 500,000 protesters in an anti-war march. The march also passed off peacefully.

A truly inspiring event, and the pizza in the Rifondizi Comunista café was great, too!

European media ownership

THE International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) has just produced a report, *European Media Ownership: Threats on the Landscape*. The report provides an overview of who owns what in the European Union.

The report is one part of the work done by the regional organisation of the IFJ, the European Federation of Journalists, to alert journalists and other groups within the EU, including the European Parliament, to the threats to pluralism and diversity posed by media globalisation and the emergence of powerful European media groups.

The report is available at www.ifj.org.

Messier's Revenge

JEAN-MARIE MESSIER, the disgraced former boss of Vivendi Universal, has published his defence four months after being kicked out from the top job in the near-bankrupt media group. Extracts of the book, *Mon Vrai Journal (My True Diary)* have appeared in *Le Monde*.

Far from taking responsibility for his own attempt to build a global media group through a series of financially reckless deals, he lists the factors that conspired against him, including his over exposure in the French media, his own board members, American shareholders, and the French financial elite.

Messier has also announced he will also have to vacate his luxurious New York apartment now he has fallen on hard times.

THE FIREFIGHTERS AND THE MEDIA



He must be living on another planet. This is Kim Fletcher in *The Daily Telegraph*, November 15, in a piece headlined 'Papers show a striking lack of condemnation'. He argues, 'Papers are reluctant to condemn the fireman ... editorials critical of strike action are couched in cautious language, with praise preceding every "but".'

He quotes Paul Routledge in the *Mirror* (the only paper which during the run-up to the first two-day strike by firemen unequivocally supported the firemen's case for a big pay increase) and comments, 'You won't find stuff like that in the Sun and the Mail, but nor will you find an attack on firemen.'

Well, let's just give some examples of the wave of press attacks. The *Financial Times* has an editorial (November 12): 'It is time for the employers to get tough' which argues for an ultimatum: 'accept new terms or think about alternative careers', and concludes, 'The possibility of dismissal helps concentrate minds wonderfully.'

On the same day as Kim Fletcher's piece *The Daily Telegraph* the paper also had an editorial attacking both the firemen as 'villains' and the government for 'gross irresponsibility' for not taking control of the modern fire engines.

But it was the Sun, (November 14) which takes the biscuit for its front-page story headlined 'Fire Union Chiefs are Saddam Stoooges', which

reports the visit of two union officials to the Iraqi fire services. In tones reminiscent of the worst assaults of the Sun on trade unions and the 'loony-left' the 1980s the editorial concludes, 'The fireman are being treated like pawns in an old-fashioned class war. Just like the doomed miners were by Marxist Arthur Scargill. Gilchrist and his far-left cronies never wanted this dispute settled. They wanted a revolution. How Che would have loved it.'

If this is reluctance to condemn the miners, as Kim Fletcher thinks, it beggars belief what he thinks an all-out attack would read like.

SCOTTISH MEDIA GROUP

THREE bidders remain in the battle for SMG's Glasgow papers, *The Herald*, *Sunday Herald* and *Evening Times*. The front-runner, with a bid of around £225m for the three titles, and owner of the Edinburgh-based *Scotsman* titles, *The Scotsman* and *Scotland on Sunday*, is the Barclay brothers. They are putting a good deal of energy into lobbying to build support for their bid.

This has caused some concern because of the approach Andrew Neil, the man who is the publisher for the *Scotsman* titles. He has been a critic of devolution, the Scottish Parliament, and remains a Eurosceptic, and the result has been that sales and profits of the titles have declined. The prospect of a Neil-run *Herald* is not welcomed with enthusiasm.

But there are other important issues. One is the vital question of plurality. If the *Herald* and *Sunday Herald* were acquired by the Barclay brothers they would have all four of the key titles covering Scotland's heavily populated central belt. What stance might the papers take in a referendum on the joining the Euro with Andrew Neil overseeing all the titles? There is also the possibility that acquisition of the SMG titles might mean merging titles like the *Sunday Herald* and *Scotland on Sunday*, which will also diminish diversity in the Scottish press.

Another controversial issue is that whilst this is clearly an issue of concern to the Scottish Parliament, powers over the media are reserved for the British Parliament. This is one issue that the Communications Bill

needs to amend, so that decisions on media policy in Scotland at the very least involve representation of Scottish interests on OFCOM.

Apart from the Barclay brothers, there are two other bids. One is Archant, a Norwich private group which owns London's *Hampstead and Highgate Express* and other regional and freesheet titles. The other is Providence, a venture-capital business in which Tony O'Reilly's Independent News and Media has a 15% stake.

LICENCE FEE ATTACK

AT THE end of October the *Daily Telegraph* started a 'debate' about the future of the licence fee. In a back-ground piece written by Stephen Robinson on October 25 he pointed out the dominance of the BBC's online activities, and the inability of commercial groups to compete with the BBC's investment of £102m and the employment of 1,000 staff to run it.

Another issue he pointed to was the development of digital education services by the BBC, again delivered free, which will squeeze out private sector competitors. The BBC plans to spend £135m on the education channel, according to the British Internet Publishers' Alliance (BIPA)—a group of commercial newspaper and radio online providers.

Add to that Rupert Murdoch's anger at the BBC UK History channel on Freeview, which he says competes directly with subscription channels offering similar fare, and we have the beginnings of a campaign to cut the BBC down to size by challenging the validity of the licence fee.

A *Daily Telegraph* YouGov poll found 'almost two out of three—58 per cent—of those who took part said the licence fee was no longer justifiable in an era when as many as 300 television channels were available'. The findings are dubious—it depends how you ask the question to get the result you want.

Now *Sunday Times* writer and ex-Sky PR writer, Jonathan Miller, is using the Human Rights Act to say the licence fee is a violation of his human rights because it interferes with his right to receive and impart information.

Expect more of this as we move to the BBC Charter renewal in 2006.

DREAMS & NIGHTMARES

...a tale of two demos

MICK GOSLING

DREAMS and nightmares? Forget it. It's hallucinations that really cause the trouble.

Take September 28th. Or shall we call that 9/28? I had delusions. I thought I was one of three volunteer media spokesperson for something called the Stop the War Coalition. I was jealous. Apparently the Countryside Alliance had 12 full time media operatives and the support of most of the media, which always helps. Here we were—a tiny band of disorganised fanatics who were thought to boast 100 people and 10 dogs on a string to oppose a war on Iraq.

Then I had this dream. Hundreds of thousands of people marching carrying placards saying 'Don't attack Iraq' and 'Not in my Name'. I know it was a dream because the fount of all truth—the print media—didn't report it. The Express and the People didn't run a word. There were nibs in the Sunday tabloids and the Sunday Mirror ran a page 19 piece after page after page of Curried Major. The Observer carried a rather cynical, disengaged piece but not a rounded report. Somehow, the Independent on Sunday did manage a front page picture. So it did happen, didn't it? On Monday The Independent carried a story, as did The Guardian, beneath a much larger and unintelligible graphic by an 'artist' which said nothing about anything—but that's The Grauniad. No other paper reported this invisible event. So it didn't happen, did it?

My delusions got worse. From 9am on 28th September I dreamt, with two other unpaid volunteers (NUJ, of course), that we were organising end-to-end television interviews with the BBC, ITN, Sky and this non-existent demonstration was running all over their bulletins. It was true. Many broadcast media reporters were clearly stunned by what was unfolding in front of their own eyes and quickly realised that we were a more honest and reliable source of information than anyone else—including the police, who, as late as 12.30pm were still giving out a figure of 30,000.

Early morning, ITN even mentioned how nice the weather was, which obviously got a few (hundred thousand) London napeheads out of bed to join the overnight heroes from Aberdeen and all points North, South, East and West.

The Stop the War Coalition had consistently refused to be drawn on the question of numbers ahead of the demo. A week previously the Countryside Alliance had put 400,000 on the

streets or in the clubs of Pall Mall—my God, it was so democratic they even let women in, provided they were upper class. But the comparison was the line the press wanted to pursue.

A couple of days before the demonstration, the Coalition and co-organisers, the Muslim Association of Britain, held a press conference at Parliament. Most of the nationals were present. All we asked for was equal treatment. We didn't ask papers to support us, just report the facts. For the first time, The Guardian responded. No other national newspaper did. The editorial mindset was clear. Question after question about numbers came in. The judgement—if you don't put 400,000 on the streets the Stop the War demonstration will be judged a failure. When 400,000 were on the streets the print media ignored it. Of course the countryside march was a big story—and we were not saying they had too much coverage, but it's fair to ask why a demonstration the same size only seven days later had so little.

Well, it happened. In Malaysia it was reported as 600,000. And this was an historic demonstration, ranking alongside those of the Chartists, not simply because of its size but because of the incredibly diverse peoples it brought together. It was big news by any standards.

My abiding memory isn't of RMT leader Bob Crow's valiant efforts to steward the front line of the demonstration, with the dangerously heaving pack of humanity behind him. The memory I treasure most is of three ultra orthodox Jews who, having got permission to break their Sabbath, walked from Hackney to Hyde Park and came onto the speakers' platform carrying a Palestinian flag and received a rapturous reception from a huge crowd containing tens of thousands of Muslims. The photographers went barmy, but no pictures appeared.

This demonstration was reported around the world. Chilean and Japanese television was there along with the European media and photo agencies. Al Jazeera fed the whole demonstration to countries throughout the Middle and Arab East. A Chicago radio station carried a live 20-minute interview. The Sydney Morning Herald carried a long and accurate account. The march was so un-

newsworthy that a leading Israeli newspaper found it necessary to carry a vitriolic editorial attacking it.

But in the overwhelming majority of the British press, nothing. What you can't stomach you can't digest.

Compare this with the coverage of the Countryside Alliance. The media, and print media in particular, had positively built its demonstration. Aside from a map of the route with tube stations and toilets marked, the London Evening Standard before the march had said in a headline that 500,000 were expected on it. The Torygraph and Mailodorous systematically promoted the Countryside Alliance march. The Mail carried an opinion piece from Jeanette Winterson supporting the Countryside Alliance march. It did not carry an article about her public support for the Stop the War demonstration.

Coverage matters. The Stop the War Coalition/Muslim Association of Britain got virtually none until a very short item on BBC's Newsnight a few days before 28/9. Immediately, this produced thousands of hits on the coalition's website from people who wanted to know how they could get to the demonstration.

Any news is better than no news. Being marginalised is what does the worst damage. It says your views don't matter, your not part of the legitimate debate. Acres of newspaper and broadcast space is devoted to not if to go to war, but when to go to war. The only faint heart-searching is whether it is a notionally UN-led war as opposed to a US-led one.

The broadcast media redeemed itself on 28 September because its reporters, if not all of their editors, worked to good journalistic standards. With a few marginal exceptions the print media did not.

Reporters off the Mail, Telegraph and so on were all there. Perhaps they could tell us (Free Press protects its sources) why there was no coverage either before or after the Stop the War demonstration as opposed to the saturation coverage of the Countryside Alliance march. I think we should be told.

Activism pays off

IN OCTOBER I spoke at two lively events—the Stockport Peace Forum and the Featherbank Forum in Horsforth, Leeds—and at both the hot topic was the massive coverage given to the Countryside March, compared to the paucity of the coverage of the Coalition Against the War march. I argued then that we have to be more active in challenging both media bias and media omission.

Many people are pessimistic about the impact of writing to complain to newspapers and broadcasters but if we don't do it, nothing changes. In the USA, Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) has a system of Action Alerts, which invite its supporters to write or email the media when they want to challenge inaccurate reports. We print below how FAIR alerted people to the limited coverage in the US media of the march in Washington DC on 26 October against war with Iraq, and asked them to complain.

In the UK it is worth looking at the similar work that Media Lens do to challenge bias, inaccuracy and omission in the UK media (www.medialens.org).

GRANVILLE WILLIAMS

About turn!

THREE days after its first report on the D.C. antiwar protests, readers of the New York Times were treated to a much different account of the same event. On October 30, the Times reported that the October 26 protests 'drew 100,000 by police estimates and 200,000 by organisers', forming a two-mile wall of marchers around the White House. The turnout startled even organisers, who had taken out permits for 20,000 marchers.

This directly contradicted the Times' October 27 report, which noted that the 'thousands' of demonstrators were 'fewer people... than organisers had said they hoped for.' The October 30 Times report also included much more information about similar protests around the country, and featured quotes from various antiwar activists.

The second Times story may have been a reaction to the overwhelming response to FAIR's October 28 Action Alert critical of the paper's downplaying of the protest. FAIR has received more than 1,100 copies of individual letters sent to the Times or to NPR, whose coverage was also cited in the action alert—one of the largest volumes of mail ever generated by a FAIR action alert. The newspaper trade magazine Editor & Publisher (10/30/02) suggested that the October 30 piece was a 'make-up article' that may have been written 'in response to many

organised protest letters sent to the Times since the paper's weak, and inaccurate, initial article about the march on Sunday.'

The paper has not yet issued an editor's note or correction explaining the different reports, though senior editor Bill Borders sent an apologetic message to many of the people who wrote to the paper.

'I am sorry we disappointed you,' he said. 'Accurately measuring the size of a crowd of demonstrators is nearly impossible and often, as in this case, there are no reliable objective estimates.' Borders defended the Times' overall coverage of the Iraq debate, and thanked activists for contacting the paper: 'We appreciate your writing us and welcome your careful scrutiny. It helps us to do a better job.'

National Public Radio, another target of FAIR's action alert, has also offered a correction of its misleading coverage of the D.C. protest. The following message is now posted on NPR's website:

On Saturday, October 26, in a story on the protest in Washington, D.C. against a U.S. war with Iraq, we erroneously reported on All Things Considered that the size of the crowd was 'fewer than 10,000.' While Park Service employees gave no official estimate, it is clear that the crowd was substantially larger than that. On Sunday, October 27, we reported on Weekend Edition that the crowd estimated by protest organisers was 100,000. We apologize for the error.

FAIR thanks all of the activists who wrote to the New York Times and NPR about their coverage of the D.C. protests. Those who did write or call might consider sending a follow-up note to the outlets to encourage serious, ongoing coverage of the growing antiwar movement.

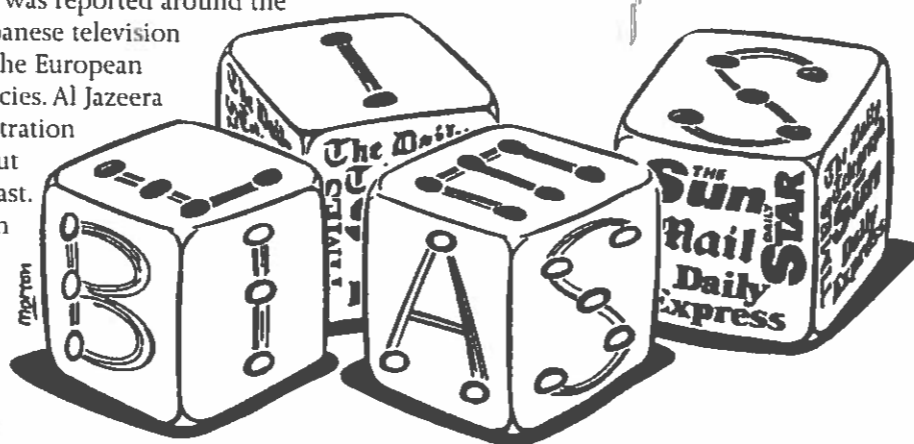
HELPING THE CPBF

OUR appeal topped £11,000 in November, following generous donations from BECTU, the NASUWT, NIPSA, and the NUJ. In addition the fund raising evening with Nick Jones held on 22 October raised over £260. We have received donations from union branches and individuals ranging from £1 to over £100. To all of you who have given, many thanks.

However, we do need to press on towards the target of £20,000 if we are to complete our work around the Communications Bill. Months of hard campaigning and lobbying lie ahead. We do not have the resources of the media barons and multinationals whose footprints are all over the legislation. So every donation, no matter how small, is welcome and needed.

Keep it coming, please.

GEOFF MASON
National Treasurer



CPBF NEWS

COMMS BILL 'THREATENS SCOTTISH PRODUCTION' MSPS WARNED

'MUCH of Scotland's media could soon be owned by companies with no Scottish connection or commitment to Scottish programming.'

This was the message to members of the Scottish Parliament from CPBF National Secretary Jonathan Hardy at a recent parliamentary briefing on the communications bill.

Jonathan Hardy and Peter Murray, a member of the NUJ national executive and a well-known reporter with BBC Scotland met the MSPs in the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh on 14 November. They warned that the government must be stopped from opening UK media outlets to media moguls outside the EEA. It was vital that the bill be changed so as to retain and strengthen media ownership restrictions designed to promote plurality and diversity.

Jonathan Hardy stressed that Scottish production and programmes about Scotland would soon be a thing of the past unless the Communications Bill made sure that much

stronger public service obligations were written into broadcasters' licences. The licences, he argued, should stipulate a minimum level of investment in original, high quality productions covering news and current affairs and programmes of specific interest to the nations and regions of the UK.

MSPs were urged to press Scotland's First Minister for a members' debate on bill, to call for the new super-regular OFCOM to be obliged to consult the Scottish Parliament and to push for a representative for Scotland on the main OFCOM board, the Content Board and the Consumer Panel.

The briefing took place at a time of major upheaval in Scottish communications with the Scottish Media Group struggling to pay a £408m debt by selling off assets including the Glasgow-based titles *The Herald*, *Sunday Herald* and *Evening Times*.

We are getting a Scottish group together to work around the bill and how it impacts on Scotland. Contact the CPBF national office (see below) for further details.

UNIONS JOINT ACTION ON COMMUNICATIONS BILL

MEDIA and communications trade unions and CPBF have launched joint action on the Government's communications bill. Representatives of CPBF, the NUJ, BECTU, the GPMU, CWU, Equity, the Writers' Guild and Directors' Guild of Great Britain plus the Federation of Entertainment Unions (FEU) have been meeting and sharing information on a regular basis as well as contacting MPs.

They hammered out their lobbying strategy at a special seminar at the NUJ offices on 20 November with John Grogan MP.

A Westminster briefing for MPs and Peers took place on 2 December the day before the bill got its second reading. A resolution on the bill from this year's TUC Congress has given added impetus to these efforts.

And the TUC is currently seeking a meeting with Media Secretary Tessa Jowell to relay the unions' view that public service obligations within the media must be strengthened.

Free Press is edited by Granville Williams for the National Council

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Shayler through the looking glass

BARRY WHITE

'IT WAS one of the most baffling trials ever seen at the Old Bailey' commented Martin Bright, Home Affairs Editor writing in *The Observer*. A chapter closed in Court No 1 on 5 November when Judge Justice Alan Moses (the lead prosecutor in the Matrix Churchill trial in the early 90's) handed down a six month sentence. David Shayler's lengthy fight to expose wrong doings and corruption in Britain's security services, had earned him little sympathy from much of the press and immediate imprisonment in Belmash, one of Britain's top security prisons. But it is only the end of a chapter, not of the story which first surfaced on 24 August 1997 a year after he left MI5.

If the press could find little sympathy for the man, many expressed concern about the trial. The day after it opened Richard Norton Taylor wrote in *The Guardian* (October 7) that the '...court yesterday heard legal arguments relating to the trial of David Shayler.... The judge ruled they cannot be reported.'

What the press was unable to report

was that two ministers, David Blunkett, Home Secretary and Jack Straw, Foreign Secretary had signed Public Interest Immunity certificates. This was to prevent David Shayler from making a proper defence, which was already limited by the lack of a public interest defence in the 1989 Official Secrets Act.

When such certificates are issued it is usual for the judge to publicly hear the arguments for and against the applications. On this occasion the judge decided to hear them in private. After his ruling a number of articles speculating on Shayler's evidence, and the government's efforts to keep it secret, were taken down from newspaper websites. So two ministers had exerted government pressure on the court to ensure that certain proceedings were to take place in secret, and that the principles of open justice and a fair trial were to be ignored. In addition David had to submit every statement and question he proposed to make in open court to the judge and the prosecution in private. So everything he wanted to say had to be vetted before it could be

heard by the jury. How could a fair trial be held on this basis?

The story is far from over. David should be out of prison early in the New Year. There will be an appeal to the European Court of Human Rights and the government may be forced to act, sometime in the future. And much unfinished business about the Gadaffi plot, which was kept out of the trial and off the charge sheet!

Meantime the Shayler case shows that those who work for the security service need whistleblowing rights. Under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, workers who speak out against corruption and malpractice at work have statutory protection against victimisation and dismissal. No such right exists for disclosures in breach of the Official Secrets Act. Not only was David Shayler denied his rights in court, we have been denied our rights to know what is being carried out in our name. Press freedom, the right to report, freedom of expression and the right to a fair trial have all been victims. The state has won a pyrrhic victory in this case. We are the losers along with justice.

accepting it. The other three independents, Scottish Television, Grampian (both part of Scottish Media Group) and Ulster Television, have rejected it. In Wales HTV, owned by Granada, will be ITV1 Wales.

Meanwhile dedicated regional voices based in the regional franchise areas are being scrapped in favour of continuity announcers based in London. Again, all part of the rebranding and a move to a single ITV.

News & current affairs

THERE IS some grim reading in a survey of news and current affairs published jointly by the Independent Television Commission and the Broadcasting Standards Council. It points out that the average viewing for news programmes has fallen from nine hours a month in 1994 to eight hours this year, and that viewing of current affairs programmes has fallen

by a third.

Even the attempt to lure viewers to new styles of journalism has failed. ITV1's *Tonight with Trevor McDonald* averaged 2.1m viewers last year, as against 6.7m for its predecessor, *World in Action*, in 1994.

The report points out that whilst some programmes have maintained their audiences, it is the ones which have been shunted around the schedule—BBC1's *Panorama* and the ITN News at Ten which have dropped audiences the most sharply.

The report also states, 'Television news is less effective than it used to be at reaching young people, and has severe difficulties among some sections of Britain's ethnic minority communities.'

There is also a controversial proposal in the report that OFCOM should relax the rules on impartiality so that News channels could follow a clearly defined agenda.

Richard Lindley *Panorama: Fifty Years of Pride and Paranoia Politico's* £18.99

PANORAMA does not sound like a pleasant place to work. It was not only those pioneers of the 1950s and 1960s who were a bunch of self-centred individualists, rude to their subordinates, contemptuous of their critics and suspicious even of each other (acting like schoolchildren who use their arms to hide their work, according to Richard Lindley). Throughout the programme's history—it has its 50th birthday next year—there has been a clear sense of being part of an elite. Yet sackings have been arbitrary, mistakes have received no mercy, and, although it achieved its prestige and political significance under a woman—the legendary Grace Wyndham Goldie—women on the programme have had to fight against arrogance and misogyny.

So is 50 quite old enough? Is it time for the venerable programme to be shelved in the new communications world of OFCOM and 24 hour news? Some ex-*Panorama* people canvassed in this book think it is. Richard Lindley argues that currently the BBC is afraid to kill it off, but is allowing it to wither in its late night Sunday slot, supporting instead trendier formats such as *Macintyre Undercover*. But, he insists, traditional current affairs is needed more than ever, and he argues for three conditions, a peak time slot, proper funding, and on the on-screen authority provided by known and trusted journalists.

Although Lindley spent 15 years as a *Panorama* reporter, this history does not depend on reminiscence and anecdote. (Although he can not resist the story of posing as a tourist couple with producer Lorraine Heggessey, he is sufficiently restrained not to point to the irony when this same energetic woman becomes Controller of BBC1 and backs the move to a more entertainment based channel).

Instead, *Panorama* and its contributors are treated to Lindley's own cool reporting style, and, threaded through this account, are reflections on the nature of current affairs television, and in particular the role of the current affairs journalist. For many years the programme used a magazine format, with a number of items from

a regular team of reporters. He argues this enabled the journalists to build up a continuity of work, so that the audience could become familiar with their individual style and trust their ability to assess a situation and relay it accurately. But certain dilemmas are posed: to what extent should reporters be allowed to express their own opinions? How should the journalists' explanatory words be balanced against the much more engaging visuals? Despite loud complaints, *Panorama* early on insisted that each story should have a producer to look after the visuals and balance the possible excesses of some of the larger than life personalities. Much later, under John Birt's 'Khmer Rouge' regime (Lindley's leaves the reader in no doubt as to his position on Birtism) the situation was reversed and explanation took precedence, with each story mapped and scripted before shooting could begin.

Panorama, and other current affairs programmes have re-invented themselves many times over the 50 years of their existence. Lindley demonstrates how, despite changing fashions and many personal and institutional failings, a form of reliable journalism has evolved which has been at the centre of public service broadcasting.

A space had been created for comment on social, political and international affairs which has been, as far as possible, protected from political and commercial pressures. Whatever the new re-invention, what must be protected above all, is that space.

PATRICIA HOLLAND is writing a history of the ITV current affairs series, This Week.

Richard Stott *Dogs and Lampposts Metro* £17.99

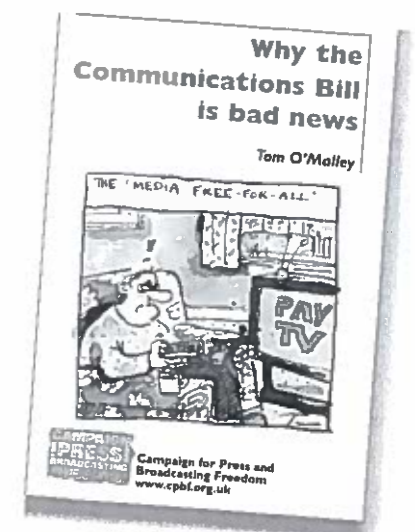
THE book takes its title from H.L. Mencken's observation that the relationship between the journalist and the politician is the same as that between a dog and a lamppost. Richard Stott's story of his life in journalism makes a very interesting read. For me the key bits are the experience of working on Maxwell's *Mirror* as the editor, and his efforts to prevent Maxwell using the paper as a publicity vehicle for his monstrous ego.

But there are also lots of interesting chunks dealing with his work as an investigative reporter, and his experience of editing the *People* (twice) and *Today* as a *Daily Mirror* in exile for Rupert Murdoch until he killed the paper. Stott also has some withering comments on the decision by Reed International to sell to Maxwell, and the decision by the banks to put the paper post-Maxwell in the hands of David Montgomery, Clive Hollick and Charlie Wilson, which led to the paper losing circulation and its best journalists under Montgomery's appalling period of control.

There are some surprising judgments, too. High praise for the investigative journalism of Paul Foot, and some withering comments on Hugh Cudlipp for hanging on to power by becoming part of the establishment and not responding to the changed world of the 1960s. He also stands by the verdict on Maxwell which was on the front page the day after Maxwell's death, 'The Man Who Saved the *Mirror*'. That's a pretty tall claim to agree with. Certainly Stott, whilst editor under Maxwell, did manage to stabilise the circulation, and even for a time increase sales but that was because he managed to protect the papers from the proprietors' worst excesses.

Journalists' memoirs can be pretty dire and uncritical about the practice of journalism. This one certainly isn't—it is really informative, and packed with insights, and as an added bonus stories in it which just make you burst out laughing as you read it.

GRANVILLE WILLIAMS



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